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## THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FULLY DEVELOPED CLAIM (FDC) PROGRAM

“The FDC Program is the fastest means of getting a claim processed.”

### Veterans Service Officers

You have always been instrumental in assisting our nation's Veterans throughout the benefits claim process; we thank you for your continued service. We are reaching out to you now to inform you of VA's Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Program. We believe the FDC program to be a springboard to reducing the overall processing times of Veterans' claims and an important step towards “breaking the back of the backlog”. With your help, it is our hope that we will together initiate awareness, promote understanding, and encourage Veteran participation in the FDC program.

The purpose of this flyer is to educate you as to the premise of the FDC program, the claims eligible, and the information and evidence required for FDC participation.

THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS  
AFFAIRS FULLY DEVELOPED  
CLAIM (FDC) PROGRAM  
BREAKING THE BACK OF THE  
BACKLOG

The Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Program is a new and innovative program designed to provide swift and expeditious treatment of eligible “fully developed” compensation or pension claims.

The FDC Program is the fastest means of getting a claim processed. A participating Veteran with an eligible claim will have his/her claim expeditiously routed through the claims process for a swift decision. Participation will not affect the quality of care a Veteran receives or the benefits to which a Veteran is entitled.

To participate, the FDC Program requires that a Veteran complete and submit a Fully Developed Claim Certification and either a VA Form 21-526EZ, Fully Developed Claim (Compensation), for a compensation claim, or a VA Form 21-527EZ, Fully Developed Claim (Pension), for a pension claim. The Veteran must also submit, with the application and certification, all relevant and pertinent evidence to “fully develop” the claim. VA Form 21-526EZ and VA Form 21-527EZ provide, in detail, claims eligible for the FDC program as well as notification of all information and evidence necessary to “fully develop” and substantiate these claims. The criteria to “fully develop” a claim, extracted from VA Form 21-526EZ and VA Form 21-527EZ, are provided on page two of this flyer.

How does it work? VA, traditionally, after it receives a claim from a Veteran will only then provide the Veteran notification of what is required from him/her to substantiate the claim via the Duty to Assist letter. The FDC program is unique in that it provides notification of the evidence

necessary to substantiate an eligible claim at the time of application, allowing the Veteran to understand what is required of him/her at that time. A Veteran participating in the FDC program will send the required evidence with the claim and certify that he/she has nothing further to provide. By doing this, a Veteran dramatically reduces the processing time of his/her claim by eliminating the time VA would normally spend developing for evidence from that Veteran. VA is able to process these claims far more quickly than claims going through the traditional claims process. In addition, VA has established priority channels to expeditiously route FDCs.

### THE KEY

**VA Forms 21-526EZ and 21-527EZ** are truly what make the FDC program unique. These forms provide Veterans Claims Assistance Act (VCAA) notification requirements (as required by 38 U.S.C 5103) for eligible claims at the time in which a Veteran applies for the benefit rather than through the traditional process, post-VA claim receipt via the Duty to Assist letter.

**Compensation FDC Criteria** (all below information/evidence must be submitted simultaneously):

1. It must be a rating-related claim for live compensation (new/first-time, secondary, and increased disability service connection claims) submitted on VA Form 21-526EZ, Fully Developed Claim (Compensation), signed by the Veteran.
2. The Veteran must submit, with the claim, the Fully Developed Claim Certification signed and dated by the Veteran or authorized representative.
3. The Veteran must submit with the Fully Developed Claim Certification:
  - All, if any, relevant, private medical treatment records for the disabilities claimed and an identification of any treatment records from a Federal treatment facility such as a VA medical center.
  - For Guard and Reserve members, any and all service treatment and personnel records in the custody of the Veteran's unit(s).
  - If claiming dependents, a completed VA Form 21-686c, Declaration of Status of Dependents.
4. The Veteran must report for any VA medical examinations VA determines are necessary to decide the claim.

**Pension FDC Criteria** (all below information/evidence must be submitted simultaneously):

1. It must be a rating-related claim for live pension submitted on VA Form 21-527EZ, Fully Developed Claim (Pension), signed by the Veteran.
2. The Veteran must submit, with the claim, the Fully Developed Claim Certification signed and dated by the Veteran or authorized representative.
3. The Veteran must submit with the Fully Developed Claim Certification:
  - All, if any, relevant, private medical treatment records, and an identification of any treatment records from a Federal treatment facility such as a VA medical center.
  - All necessary income and net-worth information.
  - For special monthly pension claims, a completed VA Form 21-2680, Examination for Housebound Status or Permanent Need for Regular Aid and Attendance, or, if claiming special monthly pension based on nursing home attendance, a VA Form, 21-0779, Request for Nursing Home Information in Connection with Claim for Aid and Attendance.
  - If claiming dependents, a completed VA Form 21-686c, Declaration of Status of Dependents.
4. The Veteran must report for any VA medical examinations VA determines necessary to decide the claim.

**Opportunity for "Other" Claims to Receive Expeditious Processing in the FDC Program**

A rating-related compensation or pension claim that is not a live compensation claim for new/first-time, secondary, or increased disability service-connection or live pension may still be accepted for priority processing in the FDC Program. To participate, such a claim must be received fully developed. That is, it should meet FDC criteria (other than the requirement that it is one of the above-mentioned claim types) and be received with all, if any, relevant records and evidence to include any (completed) VA form necessary to process that claim. Such claims received fully developed will be provided a VCAA notification with an appended FDC Certification subsequent to claim submission. The claimant must complete and return this FDC Certification within 30 days to have his or her claim expeditiously processed in the FDC Program. Submitting any information or evidence (other than the Certification) after receipt of the claim may serve to remove the claim from the FDC program. Once removed, it will be processed in the standard claim process.

**Don't yet have all the above evidence together to simultaneously submit for participation in the FDC program?**

**Submit an FDC informal claim!**

An FDC informal claim is simply a statement, accompanied by the Veteran's name and claim number, which reads, "I intend to apply for compensation/pension benefits under the FDC Program. This statement is to preserve my effective date for entitlement to benefits. I am in the process of assembling my claim package for submission".

By doing this, the date the informal claim is received by VA will serve as the effective date for entitlement to benefits if the claim is ultimately approved. When the Veteran has all the information and evidence ready to submit the claim as "fully developed", send it to VA and VA will expeditiously route the claim. Normal effective date rules apply.

When making an FDC informal claim, be sure to send only the above statement with the Veteran's name and claim number. Submit the "fully developed" claim within one year of VA's notice letter to preserve the effective date. Once the "fully developed" claim is received by VA, any subsequent information or evidence submitted to VA may serve to remove that claim from the FDC program.